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RUEHNY/ODC OSLO NO PRIORITY
RUEHNY/USDAO OSLO NO PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 1544
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0308
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 OSLO 000386

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SUBJECT: NORWAY IS GOOD: NORWEGIAN EXCEPTIONALISM

REF: A. OSLO 115

[1](#)B. OSLO 116

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Kevin M. Johnson
for reasons 1.4 b and d

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY. Norway's sense of exceptionalism, while under some pressure due to some significant policy failures, still is a central part of the national culture and has an outsized impact on Norwegian foreign policy. Norwegians truly believe that there is something inherently good about being Norwegian and that Norway has a special role in promoting peace globally. Those who do not agree with Norway's priorities are viewed as at best misguided and at worst morally wrong. Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere in many ways personifies Norwegian exceptionalism, but he is in no way unique. His decision to remain in the room during President Ahmadinejad's speech before the Durban II conference and his explanation that "someone had to answer Iran" is a recent reflection of the Norwegian approach. USG policy makers should be aware of this approach as what makes Norway a driven and dedicated partner can also make it a loose cannon. END SUMMARY.

Typical Norwegian is to be Good

[1](#)2. (C) Norway has a long history of exceptionalism. Norway remains today the only nation to explicitly reject EU membership in referenda twice. A common theme of both "no" campaigns was that the EU was not democratic enough, did not promote fair trade and did not reflect Norway's high standards. Resistance to EU membership remains at record levels today, showing a continued reluctance to join the vast majority of other European nations. Norway's exceptionalism also has a moral dimension, perhaps best expressed by former PM Gro Harlem Brundtland's famous quote "It is typical of a Norwegian to be good at things." Although Brundtland was referring to Norway's successes in the 1994 Winter Olympics, this quote has taken on a life of its own and is often mentioned as a good summary of Norwegian identity. The feeling of inherent goodness is reinforced by the consistent top ranking Norway receives in the UN's Human Development Index, a great source of pride for Norwegians. Norwegians also react strongly to any challenges to Norway's "goodness." A clear example is Norway's negative reaction to international criticism of its whaling, which the GON staunchly defends as scientific and good for the overall whale population. A previous Norwegian Ambassador to

Washington told DCM that wealth and security had led to "oil arrogance in Oslo."

The Tradition continues

13. (C) The current government has continued this tradition of moral exceptionalism and actively seeks to bring Norway's principles to bear on global issues. One example was the GON's decision to initiate political level contacts with Hamas, when Hamas was part of the Palestinian Unity Government. While the EU and the U.S. insisted Hamas first accept the "Quartet principles," the GON went it alone, to significant local and international criticism. This reflected the high priority that Norwegians place on dialogue and their rejection of boycotts. Norwegian culture has a heavy focus on reaching solutions and consensus. This shapes their affection for dialogue and for many Norwegians conducting dialogue is an end to itself. They believe it is guaranteed to resolve conflict, if only participants devote themselves to the process. (See reftels)

14. (C) Promotion of dialogue is not the only way Norway sees itself as exceptional. Some other obvious examples include:

--The GON's pledge to be carbon neutral by 2050 (far exceeding any other country's goals) is an example of the weighty rhetoric used by the GON to characterize itself as an environmental leader. The fact that Norway's wealth comes from oil exports which are used to purchase offsets from poor countries, sparing much of the adjustment that would

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otherwise be needed to meet such a climate goal is rarely mentioned.

--Norway boasts of devoting one percent of its GDP to developmental aid (and is nearly alone in this commitment). It views of itself as a leading nation in fighting poverty has gone without much debate (until very recently) over how effective the aid is.

--FM Stoere and other Norwegian leaders like to point to Norway's "one thousand years of peace with Russia." They point to this continued close bilateral cooperation as unique and as a model for others to follow. (Amazingly few Norwegians recall the USSR invasion of Finland in 1939 and the fact that Norway's border was with Finland, not Russia until the USSR seized Finland's outlet to the Arctic ocean. The thousand years of peace came with a buffer ... and a price that others paid.)

--FM Stoere is particularly proud of his leadership in starting the process which resulted in the cluster munitions treaty, signed in December of 2008. During that process, the GON strongly resisted dialogue with the U.S. and other concerned states, preferring to work only with like-minded parties. This process was outside the UN framework an approach Norway has condemned in others.

--Despite a walkout of other European officials in the Durban II conference, FM Stoere remained in the audience during Ahmadinejad's speech and then delivered his speech, in which he strongly criticized Ahmadinejad. Stoere said he stayed to support the UN system and ensure extreme messages were met with resistance. He also stressed Norway's role in negotiating the text of the outcome document to something better than originally proposed. In comments after the conference, FM Stoere stated that the U.S., although not present, supported Norway's efforts to reach a consensus choice. Stoere was shocked when this was later directly challenged by a senior USG official.

15. (C) At times Norwegian leaders can be so convinced of the rightness of their cause that they are unable to understand that like-minded leaders could think differently. The GON

tends to dismiss critiques and characterize them as lacking legitimacy or out of step with international law (read UN) and ethical behavior. Failure of their policies does not seem to undermine belief in their goals and are often blamed by the failure of other parties to follow Norway's example - (e.g. dealing with Hamas).

Recent Setbacks

16. (C) Norway's golden reputation has suffered setbacks recently, but these have not dented its self-image. Seeing angry crowds burn Norwegian flags in the Middle East after the Muhammed cartoon crisis of 2005 was shocking to most Norwegians, but they were able to console themselves that Norway's Muslims did not join the uproar. The collapse of the Palestinian Unity Government in 2008 was a set-back, but the GON was able to place the blame on the rest of the international community for not following Norway's lead. The failure of the Norwegian-led negotiation process in Sri Lanka has been harder to explain. Being called "Viking Terrorists" and seeing a Norwegian Minister's picture (along with Secretary Clinton's and British FM Millibrand's) on a poster proclaiming them wanted for supporting terrorists is not something that fits with the Norwegian self-image.

Comment

17. (C) Despite some dings to Norway's reputation, its moral exceptionalism will remain part of its national consciousness and will shape Norway's foreign policy, particularly if the current government continues after the September 2009 national elections. Norway's wish to solve problems, its energetic pursuit of what it believes is right, its unshakeable belief in consensus and dialogue, its freedom of

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action in foreign policy (non-EU member), and not least its vast financial resources can make Norway a very effective partner in pursuing some U.S. goals. Although prepared to step out alone, as shown by whaling, Hamas, and Iran, Norwegians would prefer to work with allies, particularly the other Nordics or the United States. Responding positively (when possible) to Norwegian initiatives will help keep the active Norwegians pointed in the right direction and assist in achieving U.S. goals. Alternatively, policy makers should be aware that Norway has a record of striking off on its own even in the face of international consensus, when the issue at hand has a moral aspect which Norway feels cannot be ignored. Norwegians make great partners, but we must not take a team approach for granted.

WHITNEY